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Insider Tips on How to Market to a Federal CIO

(OR OTHER SENIOR GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE)

As Discussed on Government Marketing University's "Market Chat" Radio Show, Episode 1

1 Know your customer (and his or her pain points)

Senior federal IT and acquisition executives have specific challenges and pain points, and they want to know that you understand those when you reach out to them. Be sure your messaging prominently reflects and addresses the priority problems of that particular agency.

2 Target your message at the appropriate level

Contrary to what many marketing and sales people may think, CIOs and other senior federal executives are typically not making procurement decisions or weighing in on what solution is best for a given problem set. They are executives who are primarily concerned with supporting their enterprise's mission needs through the strategic application of technology. Their focus is at the strategic level, not the tactical or project level. Talk to CIOs and other senior IT executives about how to solve the enterprise-level problems they confront and about the business case for those solutions. If your messaging consists of boasting about your product's technological capabilities and prowess, it will likely fail to connect with a CIO or other senior government executive.

3 Keep your message short

An executive summary is called that for a reason. Federal CIOs and other senior executives are busy. They do not need to know all 10 selling points of your solution — they only need to know how it uniquely suits their highest-priority strategic needs and challenges. The message must respect their time and executive perspective. A successful engagement results in them passing your material onto a staff member who is more technically expert for further review and perhaps a more lengthy technical discussion.

4 Tailor your message to the agency

Email blasts and general-purpose marketing brochures (even including those tailored to a government-wide audience) will seldom capture the eyeballs of a federal CIO or other senior executive. That's because those executives know that message is oblivious to their agency-specific issues and pain points. To earn the attention of federal executives, a marketing message must immediately reflect its relevance to their agency-specific needs. It takes more time and effort, but the more agency-specific a message is, the more effective it will be.

5 Share case studies from government and the private sector

Federal IT executives don't just want to know what other federal agencies are doing. They also recognize that the leading edge of innovation typically starts first in the private sector. They want to know how large private sector enterprises are applying innovative approaches and technologies to successfully address comparable challenges and circumstances.

6 Don't sell a product — solve a problem

Before engaging a federal CIO or other senior IT executive, study up on that executive's agency, its missions, IT strategic plan, and priority IT challenges. Most senior government IT officials speak frequently at live events, webinars or to the media, so learn what they are saying about their agencies' needs, challenges and plans — then craft your message to address their pain points. Your message must focus on solving their biggest problems, not on advertising the selling points of your solution.

Tips from our Government Marketing University Ambassadors:

“ Do your research in advance and know what your government customer’s needs are, understand their pain points and anticipate what kind of challenges they might be having. If you can tailor that kind of information into your marketing messaging, you’ll be much more effective. ”

– **SIMON SZYKMAN**, Former CIO at Department of Commerce

“ Make sure the marketing information you’re presenting is relevant to the needs of the government. If you present general information, it is not going to help the government executive solve his or her IT problem. ”

– **JOHN JOHNSON**, Former Assistant Commissioner for Integrated Technology Services, General Services Administration

“ Introduce federal executives to other IT leaders who are experiencing similar challenges either within the private or public sector. ”

– **KEITH TRIPPIE**, Former Executive Director, Enterprise System Development Office, DHS

“ Focus your marketing efforts on your government customer’s Subject Matter Experts as they will bring the solution to the federal executive as a recommendation to solve their problem. ”

– **CASEY COLEMAN**, Former CIO at General Services Administration

7 Agency-specific challenges usually trump governmentwide challenges

Federal executives are well aware of the many governmentwide mandates and reforms being pushed by Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office and various inspectors general. But they are often far more consumed with agency-specific challenges they face on a day-to-day basis, whether that has to do with addressing specific cyber risks, moving away from a particular costly legacy system, or something else. Their first responsibility is to serve the mission of their agency and its various mission directorates.

8 Don't neglect the technical staff

You may think you need to reach the CIO because she calls the shots, but when it comes to deciding which system or product to purchase, the technical staff who report to the CIO wield the biggest influence. CIOs are often not technically-oriented people (they are business- or mission-oriented people) and they rely heavily on their technical experts for recommendations and counsel. It is these staff who sit on technical evaluation teams that make procurement decisions and recommendations.

9 Use social media

Social media is an extension of your messaging, so use it. Federal executives are hungry to learn and know what is happening in the marketplace and discover new solutions that might apply to their needs. And they do curate and read what is racing across LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites, as it relates to them and their agencies.

10 Cite neutral third parties and industry analysts when possible

Senior federal executives are often barraged with marketing and sales pitches in which companies frequently say they can do everything better than everyone else. So finding credible differentiation can be a challenge for them. If you can cite neutral third party analysts in your messaging, that helps set you apart.